

HAPPY VALLEY

A NOVEL

BY SUGAR RAY DODGE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book contains two different parts. The first is the original 2006 novel **Happy Valley**. The second is a trilogy of novelettes called **Scruffy's Revenge**. The chapters in Scruffy's Revenge were written several months apart, in isolation of one another. However, when put together they form a unified three-part story arc.

All events take place in the Great State of Utah. Kolob City stands in place of the real world town of Mona, but is intended to represent the cities of Hildale and Colorado City. All other locations bear the proper names of their real world counterparts.

This work **is not** a criticism of the teachings and beliefs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or Mainstream Mormonism. The zany, over-the-top depictions of Utah culture and lifestyle were crafted in the interest of creating a compelling narrative, and are presented here with much love and affection.

All references and/or allusions to real world events and popular culture are intentional, except for the ones that aren't.

PART ONE

HAPPY VALLEY

*We'll find the place which God for us prepared,
far away, in the west, where none shall come to
hurt or make afraid. There the Saints will
be blessed. We'll make the air with music ring,
shout praises to our God and King. Above the
rest, these words we'll tell: All is well, all is well!*

Come, Come Ye Saints
Verse 3

PROLOGUE

LAGOON AMUSEMENT PARK, UTAH
FRIDAY, APRIL 28, 2006

Meet Hal and Penny

Sometimes, Hal thinks he just can't win with this girl. Other times, he knows he can't. This is probably one of those times when he just thinks he can't win; otherwise, he would have given up a while ago. The two got out of the *Terror Ride* cart when it emerged from the rather boring haunted house ride and were still having the same argument they were having when the ride started.

"Look, I don't know what your problem is! It's just a ride!" Hal said, pointing back at the castle. "And it isn't even a good one. The animatronics are from the 70s, not to mention the corniness of it all. Did you really think the werewolf was going spring from its chains and attack a cart on a track?"

Hal Harper is a regular guy. He likes all the guy things; Ninjas, dinosaurs, cowboys, secret agents, monkeys, spaceships, monsters, superheroes, magic, swords, explosives, and babes. That pretty much covers all of his boyhood interests. It doesn't matter if these things are in movie form, book form, comic form, video game form or TV form. He loved stories and storytelling. That is probably why he became a filmmaker when he grew up. If he hadn't, then all that useless knowledge he wasted his youth accumulating would have rendered him utterly unemployable.

"That isn't the point, Harold!" Penny stabbed her finger in his chest. She always called him Harold when they argued, which was often. It gave her a sense of superiority over him, which she felt she needed since he was taller. She also knew he hated being called that. "The point is, that ride is intended to be evil! How are we supposed to be close to Heavenly Father at all times when we subject ourselves to things intended to be evil?"

All her life Penny was the princess of wherever she went. She seemed to have the local copyright on long blond hair, sparkly green eyes, and turtleneck sweaters in the fall and plaid skirts in the spring. Things Penny loves are her family, God, and church. She also loves her boyfriend when she has one. That is, if her boyfriend loves his family, God, and church as much as she does. If he does not, then he is in for a rough ride.

"That ride is far from evil," Hal chuckled. "I didn't see any whores, idolaters, or breakers of the Sabbath in there. All I saw were monsters. And it is supposed to be fun. Good, clean, wholesome fun! Isn't that why we came here? I bet if Brigham Young were alive to see this great amusement park, he would have ridden the *Terror Ride* twice because of how much fun it is."

Penny Slugs Hal in the Gut

Happens all the time. Whenever an argument reaches a point where Hal uses humor and sarcasm to illustrate his point, Penny hauls back and lets him have it. Hal wouldn't dare hit her back. She is way to pretty to beat. Not that he would be able to. She packs a mean punch that usually leaves him doubled over for a couple of minutes. He had gotten used to it over the past five months.

Meet Penny's Parents

"Well, it's getting late," Penny's Mom declared as she, her husband, and their son Max came around the corner. They had been playing skee-ball while Hal and Penny had gone on the evil ride after a fair amount of heated debate and controversy. The sun was setting and she always liked to be home before dark to avoid any worldly temptations of the night. This rule was safer to follow during the winter when the sun set earlier. These late summer evenings were temptations waiting to happen.

Penny's Mom is a rather joyless person. Her quest to live all gospel teachings to the word – and in most cases extremely beyond what is generally regarded necessary to be considered a *good Mormon* – left her own life void of any meaningful content, sucked all the personality out of her once fun-loving husband, and left all the children she raised in an everlasting state of pretentious snobbery.

For example, she had banned Sunday Comics from their house because, not only did the very concept violate the Sabbath Day, that disrespectful cat *Garfield* set a bad example for her children. She didn't need a house full of smart-mouthed lasagna enthusiasts.

Another example; All soda drinks were banned in extreme accordance with the grossly misunderstood *Word of Wisdom*, a set of guidelines for acceptable behavior and lifestyle set forth by Joseph Smith in the *Doctrine and Covenants*. This is where staples of Mormon culture such as sobriety and good health habits come from. It should be noted that it isn't uncommon or unreasonable for Mormon families to refrain from drinking coffee, tea and cola products, as these fall into the category of *strong drinks to be used in moderation*. But Penny's Mom takes it to such an extreme that she is reluctant to even allow packets of Kool-Aid to be mixed with cool water on a hot summer day.

"But it isn't even eight o'clock," Hal said, still holding his gut. "This place doesn't close until eleven thirty. It's the coolest after dark when all the lights come on." Penny's Mom walked up to him and narrowed her eyes.

"The spirit goes to sleep when the sun goes down," she hissed one of the creeds she had lived her life by and had taught all her offspring. "I know that when my kids move out they bend the rules a bit, but when they are with mom and dad, the rules are still the rules!"

Hal knows that Penny's Mom hates his guts and wishes that he would die a slow, painful death. She had told him so after his first date with Penny. He was a Godless heathen child from Weber County who didn't even go on a two-year bike-riding, tie-wearing mission like all good strapping young Mormon men ought. He was nowhere near good enough for her daughter.

Hal regained his composure and stood straight up.

"That's lovely," he started. "It's nice to know that your grown children are still letting you make their decisions for them. When exactly did you stop breastfeeding them? Thirteen or fourteen?"

Hal wasn't afraid of Penny's Mom, which didn't score him any points with her. He wasn't afraid of her dad, either. But then again, there really wasn't any reason to be afraid of him. He just nods, says *yes, honey*, and follows behind his wife wherever she goes. It always baffled Hal that Penny or any of her siblings even existed. When you consider the kinds of rules she enforces in everyday life, you would have to conclude similar rules apply in their romantic relationships as well. That was about as far as Hal ever took this particular train of thought. If he stayed on any board and longer, he might conjure up images that would haunt his dreams and leave him with absolutely no sex drive.

"It's okay, Hal," Penny stepped between her boyfriend and mother. She was surprisingly supportive of him whenever he got into arguments with her mom. "Mom, I'm going to stay with Hal. He'll take me home at a responsible hour, I promise." Penny never wondered why she kept letting her mother boss her around years after she had moved out.

"He better!" Penny's mother snapped back, and then turned to Max. "You make sure he keeps his hands off your sister!"

"Will do!" Max replied dutifully while making a stupid two-finger salute.

Meet Max Garland

Max is Penny's dimwitted older brother and Hal's moronic roommate. As a child, he couldn't understand why the family dog, Skittles, had fifteen puppies and not one kitten.

Max is a big guy. At first glance, you would guess he was somewhat muscular. However, upon further assessment you would realize that he is just fat. Because of his size, it was assumed he would be athletic and good at football. Their mother lifted their "no sports" rule to let Max play in high school. She hoped he would be the star running back and get a full ride scholarship to BYU after his mission. However, all the hits Max took at the hands of bigger defensive linemen furthered his intellectual plunge. All of the top-notch weed he secretly smoked on his mission in Mexico didn't help much, either.

"Remember, Penelope," the mother turned back to her daughter. "Virtue is the most important thing a young woman has. Don't let the raging hormones of someone who pretends to love you take it away from you."

"It was nice to spend time with you, too. Have a safe drive home!" Hal called after Penny's parents as they walked towards the parking lot.

Lagoon

Lagoon has been around for more than a hundred years. It was founded the same year that Utah became a part of the United States, so it is literally part of the State's culture and history. The rickety wooden roller coaster is almost as old as the park and is still one of the more popular attractions, sometimes having lines longer than the newer, faster, and probably safer coasters. That's just one example

of Lagoon's strange mix of past and present. Every other ride has a nineteenth century aura about it, and the rest of rides were ultra modern in stark contrast. Right next to the water-park section of Lagoon, there is *Pioneer Village*, an outdoor, walking museum/re-creation of Utah's pioneer lifestyle. You couldn't find a better example of the term *best of both worlds*.

Lagoon was at its peak brilliance when the sun went down, the lights came on, and the smell of cotton candy, gunpowder, and mountain air all came together – as far as Hal was concerned. Taking the Ferris wheel to the top and taking in the breathless view of the Wasatch Front before he left was a tradition he intended to keep.

He also planned to get a little kiss from Penny at the top tonight, which meant he had to somehow ditch Max. Eleven o'clock had rolled around, and the Ferris wheel was closing in fifteen minutes. The three of them were in line. Now was the time to put *Operation Ditch Dipstick* into motion.

"Hey, Max," he motioned for him to come closer to him.

"What's up, dude?" Every time Max used the word *dude* it made Hal's brain bleed.

"I think you dropped your wallet or something back at the bumper cars. You better go see if anybody turned it in."

"Dude, really?" Max's eyes widened. Without checking his pockets, he spun around and started running towards the lost and found.

"Hal, that wasn't nice," Penny scolded. She didn't call him *Harold*, so she must not have been too mad, which meant she wanted a little kissy action on the Ferris wheel as well.

Meet Hal and Penny 2

Hal is a smooth, smooth guy. He is a combination of corny pickup lines, wit, sarcasm, intelligence and genuine boyish charm. Why else would a prissy princess like Penny go out with such a cretin? Come on, now. She may have suppressed sexual desires, but sexual desires nonetheless.

And why does Hal go out with a prissy princess, especially since Penny does not seem to like him very much? Three reasons: she can sing, she smells like strawberries, and she has long blond hair, three things that Hal finds incredibly attractive. If she smoked, another attribute Hal thought was amazingly sexy, he would have already married her (first!) and (then!) bedded her in a manly fashion. Lots of times. Needless to say, Hal kept his mild smoking fetish to himself. In order to keep Penny, he needed to trick her into thinking that he was not beguiled by worldly temptations like cigarettes, bikinis, and horseback riding.

Ferris Wheel Kissing

All the cool kids do it.

The Ferris wheel slowly made its way to the top, and the lights of the surrounding cities glowed against the mountains. Hal took Penny's hand, pulled her over to him, and gently slid his face close to hers. He didn't need to talk. He looked into her eyes and let her think his eyes say whatever she wants them to say. That is

important. Girls can melt with what they think their guy's eyes are saying, and he gets all the credit.

Then there is the kissing itself. Hal gave up long ago on trying to slip Penny the tongue. She considered it a form of fornication. So for months he was content on just laying a big wet one on her. And kissing her that way seemed to be all it took to get her not break up with him for a few more days.

After about a good ten seconds, Hal pulled away from her and put his hand up to her face. He couldn't help but get lost in how beautiful she was.

"Will you marry me?"

Whoa, Whoa, Whoa! Hold on!

Was it my eyes or my mouth that just said that?

"Oh, Hal! Yes! I will! I will marry you!" cried Penny, and she threw her arms around him.

Goshdangit! I didn't even know it was possible to propose by accident!

To read the rest of the story, pick up *Happy Valley* by Sugar Ray Dodge on Amazon.com!